

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 210830Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5920

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 314

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, KS, KN

SUBJ: SOUTH KOREAN INTEREST IN RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

REF: AMMAN 153

1. SOUTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR SOH'S ACCOUNT OF HIS MEETING WITH BROTHER OF DEFMIN MUSTAFA TLAS IS SECOND INSTANCE OF ROK CONTACT WITH SYRIANS IN PAST MONTH. ON DEC 24 TWO ROK EMBOFFS FROM CAIRO ESCORTING PRES OF SOUTH KOREAN AMATEUR SWIMMING FEDERATION CALLED ON EMBOFF TO DISCUSS NORTH KOREAN ACTIVITIES IN SYRIA GENERALLY, AND SPECIFICALLY TO ASK WHETHER ANY THREAT TO THEIR PERSONAL SAFETY EXISTED IN DAMASCUS. THEY RELATED STORY OF THEIR CALL ON OFFICIAL IN SARG SPORTS OFFICE WHO HAD SOME DIFFICULTY ARRANGING ADEQUATE TRANSLATOR BUT NONETHELESS LAID ON LUNCHEON, SPORTS PINS AND FURTHER TALKS. SHORTLY BEFORE LUNCHEON IT DAWNED ON SYRIANS THAT KOREANS THEY DEALING WITH WERE FROM SOUTH, NOT NORTH, WHICH RESULTED IN SOME DEGREE OF EMBARRASSMENT ON BOTH SIDES.

2. SYRIAN-NORTH KOREAN RELATIONS HAVE BEEN VERY CLOSE
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FOR MANY YEARS AND WE FRANKLY SKEPTICAL THAT SARG WOULD

BE RECEPTIVE TO SOUTH KOREAN APPROACH. DPRK EMBASSY MAINTAINS NINE INDIVIDUALS ON CURRENT DIP LIST, MORE THAN MOST OTHER COUNTRIES INCLUDING BLOC. LAST FALL DAMASCUS HOSTED INTERNATIONAL JURIST CONFERENCE ON PEACEFUL REUNIFICATION OF KOREA, FOR WHICH SPECIAL TEAM OF PROMOTERS FLOWN IN DIRECTLY FROM PYONGYANG TO HELP ORGANIZE FESTIVITIES (75 DAMASCUS 4404) SYRIA IS STRONG BACKER OF NORTH KOREAN POSITION IN U.N. GROUP OF SYRIAN STUDENTS PRESENTLY STUDYING IN NORTH KOREA. SYRIAN MEDIA PERIODICALLY PUBLISH LAUDATORY ARTICLES ON KIM II SUNG REGIME, ESPECIALLY IN MAGAZINE "PEOPLE'S ARMY," WHERE SUCH ARTICLES APPEAR ALMOST MONTHLY. ALTHOUGH WE UNDERSTAND THAT NORTH KOREAN PILOTS ASSISTING SYRIAN AIR FORCE RETURNED HOME IN DECEMBER 1975 AND HAVE NOT BEEN REPLACED, DPRK ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE IS CONTINUING. JAN 13 AL-THAWRAH REPORTED THAT GROUP OF NORTH KOREAN TECHNICIANS HAD MET WITH MIN PETROLEUM AND MINERAL RESOURCES PREVIOUS DAY TO DISCUSS COOPERATION IN MINERAL EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION. EXCHANGES OF OFFICIAL VISITS ARE FREQUENT, MOST RECENT BEING THAT OF BAATH PARTY NATIONAL COMMAND DELEGATION HEADED BY SAMI ATTARI IN NOVEMBER AND THAT OF REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER RIFAT AL-ASAD TWO WEEKS AGO.

3. WARM RECEIPTION OF SOH BY ABDUL KADR TLASS IS NOT SURPRISING. SYRIANS TYPICALLY DIVORCE PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE FROM NATIONAL POLICY, AND OFFER LAVISH HOSPITALITY TO GUESTS. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED TO LEARN WHAT REPLY AMBASSADOR SOH RECEIVES REGARDING HIS APPROACH ON DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

4. SUBSTANCE OF THIS MESSAGE WAS SHARED WITH AMMAN-BASED SOUTH KOREAN DIPLOMAT HAK WON SONG DURING HIS CALL ON EMBASSY JAN 17.
MURPHY

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